

Vroon begins probe

Rep. eyes cancer, ex-hospital link

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — State Rep. Peter R. Vroon, R-157th, said this morning he is investigating the connection of five cases of Hodgkin's disease to the site of the former Valley Forge Army Hospital.

Vroon has already made preliminary contacts at the state and county health departments, saying he has not learned anything yet. "I expect to probe into this deeper today," Vroon said. He would not say with whom he has spoken.

"I can't divulge any of that. It's too preliminary at this point. These people have been just contacted," he said.

Vroon's investigation was initiated by Phoenixville resident Karen Johns, who he said knows one of the cancer victims.

Hodgkin's disease is marked by inflammatory enlargement of the lymph nodes, spleen, liver and kidneys, which mainly strikes males between the ages of 15 to 40.

Last week the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors learned that five area residents who live near the former Valley Forge Army Hospital grounds have contracted Hodgkin's disease. Four are present or former South Evergreen Drive residents.

At least one supervisor, G. Edward Heit, was convinced by their stories that the incidents may be more than just coincidence. Heit said he planned to call the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Ga. He asked the residents to come to this week's



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(Continued from Page 1)

board meeting with more information.

Vroon said he looking into the connection of cancer cases to a recent discovery of a high concentration of toxic chemicals on a portion of the former hospital site now owned by the Phoenixville Area School District.

District Superintendent Carolyn Trohosi reported in January that about 120 square feet of a 35-acre tract owned by the district was contaminated with heavy metals.

Lancaster Labs, a consultant hired by the district, reported levels of hazardous metals, in-

cluding lead and zinc, were abnormally high in the area bounded by Township Line and East Seven Stars roads.

The toxins came from X-ray remains burned in the hospital's incinerator. The ashes in the samples collected by Lancaster Labs contained the chemicals.

The army hospital operated for over 30 years, treating servicemen wounded in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. It closed in 1974.

Most of the site, located in Charlestown and Schuylkill townships, is occupied by the Valley Forge Christian College, but a portion of the property was sold by the federal government to the school district.

(Continued on Page 3)

Residents link cancer to army hospital grounds

By KONRAD SUROWIEC
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — Five area residents who have Hodgkin's disease have more than cancer in common — they are all neighbors of the former Valley Forge Army Hospital.

And that's no coincidence, they say.

Their stories about battling with the cancer convinced at least one member of the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors last night to agree to contact the federal Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Ga., about testing soil at the former hospital site for toxins.

Hodgkin's disease is marked by inflammatory enlargement of the lymph nodes, spleen, liver and

kidneys, which mainly strikes males between the ages of 18 to 40.

Four of the local residents who either have the disease or are in remission are current or former residents of South Evergreen Drive, which borders the former hospital.

Michael K. Fulmer Jr., 21, of Galicia Drive in Bevans Orchard, a development that borders the Valley Forge Christian College, was first diagnosed with the disease three years ago. He underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatments to remove the cancer, but it was discovered a second time.

Michael K. Fulmer Sr. said his son first underwent treatment at Lankenau Hospital, but he's now being treated at the Fox Chase Cancer Center in northeast Philadelphia.

"My son has lung damage from radiation," Fulmer said. "It (the cancer) normally relapses once."

"I found out I had the disease three months ago," said Jeff Kurtz, 20. "I want to know what's going on here."

Kurtz, an Auburn University student whose home is on North Forge Mountain Drive, lived on South Evergreen Drive from 1973 to 1981.

Frank Robinson, 44, of South Evergreen Drive, is undergoing radiation treatment for the disease. Two other former South Evergreen Drive residents who previously underwent treatments for the disease are Bob Dyer, 35, and Dennis Andrews, 27.

A high concentration of toxic chemicals has already been discovered on a nearby portion of the

land owned by the Phoenixville Area School District, which was once the site of the hospital.

The army hospital operated there for over 30 years, treating servicemen wounded in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. It closed in 1974. Most of the site, located in Charlestown and Schuylkill townships, is occupied by the Valley Forge Christian College, but a portion of the property was sold by the federal government to the school district.

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"We have a deep concern about the toxic waste found in the hospital," said James Kurtz, Jeff's father. "Four people came down with it in six families (in

adjacent homes on South Evergreen Drive.) What else did they bury down there?

"The school board must have some idea something is wrong there," said Frank Robinson. "My daughter plays baseball out there and I don't feel real confident with that."

Supervisor G. Edward Heit told the residents to bring any other pertinent information to the board at next Wednesday's 7:30 p.m. meeting because the board lacked a quorum to conduct business last night.

"As far as I'm concerned, one of us will contact the Disease Control Center," Heit said.

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THE EVENING
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Feds visit ex-hospital to investigate pollution

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

PHOENIXVILLE — Local officials and federal investigators braved heavy rains yesterday to tour the grounds of the former Valley Forge General Hospital.

The investigators, carrying radiation detectors, toured two landfills near an incinerator and buildings that once housed the hospital's laundry operation on land owned by the Phoenixville Area School District.

District Superintendent Carolyn Trohoski pointed out that there were chemicals in a pre-washing facility, as well as spot of ground near the ~~landfills~~ where grass has not grown.

Charlestown Township Board of Supervisors Chairman Irene Ewald said the brown spot is similar in shape to mine shaft openings in her township. She asked Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials to look into the history of the property because the area was known for its lead and silver mining.

(Continued on Page 10)

Feds visit ex-hospital to investigate pollution

(Continued from Page 1)

In addition to the tour, investigators from NUS Corporation interviewed Ewald, Trohoski, Schuylkill Township Supervisor Ted Ryan and Valley Forge Christian College (VFCC) officials about the property.

This was the fourth tour of the property local officials have taken with investigators since concerns were first raised about possible health risks associated with the site.

According to Lisa Cunningham, EPA project engineer, the agency was mostly concerned with the landfills, which may need to be cleaned up. The rest, she said, would probably not need remediation measures.

NUS investigators, working for the EPA, donned "Level B gear," which included respirators to go into a former psychiatric ward. There they examined containers of cyanide and Dieldrin that were found in a hallway in the building by a Valley Forge Community College contractor last month.



Schuylkill and Charlestown officials and Trohoski (center, with umbrella) meet with EPA inspectors.

Photo by Joe Wall

Sunday, April 8, 1990 11-M

Schuylkill

Disease afflicts residents

By Daniel Kaufman
Special to The Inquirer

Five men who lived near contaminated land on the old Valley Forge Army Hospital property off Charlestown Road have developed Hodgkin's disease within the last 15 years, the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors was told last week.

Three of the men, accompanied by family members, asked the supervisors Wednesday night to prod federal, state and/or county authorities to investigate a possible connection between their lymphatic cancer and toxic metals found on the land.

The Phoenixville Area School District, which leases a 35-acre piece of the property on Township Line Road near Coldstream Road from the federal government, announced it had discovered abnormally high levels of lead, zinc and silver on a depressed 6-by-20-foot section in January.

At that time, school Superintendent Carolyn Trohoski said burnt X-ray remains buried by the hospital before it closed in 1974 had caused the contamination.

Frank Robinson, 44, said, "I live there, I'm sick now and four of my neighbors are sick. Did they just bury it in one spot or did they spread it around?"

Hodgkin's disease, a rare but "very curable" form of lymph cancer, often strikes men between their late teens and early 40s, said Chris Holroyde, an oncologist at Phoenixville Hospital who is treating several of the men.

From 1971 until 1984, Robinson lived on South Evergreen Drive, which lies northeast of the contaminated area. Jeff Kurtz, 20, who also was diagnosed with cancer this year, lived there from 1973 until 1981. Michael Fulmer, 21, was diagnosed three years ago and still lives on Galicia Drive, located on the other side of the Army hospital.

Two other residents of South Evergreen Drive who once had the disease were not present at the meeting.

Holroyde said the cluster of cases next to the hospital was "very unusual." Because the cause of the disease is not known, however, "it is a statistical aberration which is interesting, but we can't prove anything."

The victims and their families asked the board, which had only two of its five members present, why it had never investigated whether the land was hazardous.

"Someone's dragging their feet," Kurtz said.

Supervisor Edward Heit said the board had notified the county Board of Health in West Chester a few days earlier after a friend of the residents told him about the five men last month.

"It sounds as though this situation had existed for some time," Heit said Thursday.

Heit said the board would postpone the meeting until 7:30 p.m. Wednesday when there should be a quorum.

3 ill residents blame toxins at old hospital

Schuylkill officials to discuss claims

4-6-90
By VERONICA PRATT
(Local News Correspondent)

SCHUYLKILL — Supervisors plan to discuss the possibility that hazardous toxins discovered at the Valley Forge Hospital might have caused residents to suffer from Hodgkins disease.

Jeff Lutz, Frank Robinson and Mike Fulmer asked the supervisors Wednesday what the township was doing about the health problem.

All three suffer from Hodgkins disease. Lutz was diagnosed in December, Robinson was just diagnosed and Fulmer, who has it for a second time, was diagnosed last summer.

Kurtz had a list of five persons who have contracted the disease and all of them lived within a mile of each other near the hospital.

Supervisor G. Edward Heit said he had

talked with an area doctor who said all of the cases couldn't have happened without something in common.

Since not enough supervisors were present for a formal meeting, Heit asked everyone to return on April 11.

The three suffering from the disease said they asked supervisors to investigate the situation in January when reports of high toxic levels in that area were made public.

The reports said high levels of lead, zinc and silver had been found in the soil of the 35-acre tract which was formerly the Valley Forge Hospital.

Lutz, 20, said although his family moved from the area, he remembers playing on the hospital grounds as a youngster, crawling under the fence to get in.

Fulmer's father said they just want answers. They'd like the supervisors to contact the Center for Disease Control to try to get someone to do tests on the land, he said.

Fulmer, 22, is going to Fox Chase Cancer Center for treatment. He has suffered heart and lung damage as a result of the heavy doses of radiation and chemotherapy treatments he has received.

Residents link cancer to army hospital grounds

By KONRAD SUROWIEC
Evening Phoenix Staff

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adjacent homes on South Evergreen Drive.) What else did they bury down there?"

"The school board must have some idea something is wrong there," said Frank Robinson. "My daughter plays lacrosse out there and I don't feel real confident with that."

Supervisor G. Edward Heit told the residents to bring any other pertinent information to the board at next Wednesday's 7:30 p.m. meeting because the board lacked a quorum to conduct business last night.

"As far as I'm concerned, one of us will contact the Disease Control Center," Heit said.

Chemical find forces athletes off area field

Schuylkill officials alert DER

4-10-90

By CHARLENE KERWIN
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — Chemicals found Friday on the grounds of the Valley Forge Christian College have forced the Phoenixville Area High School girls' lacrosse team to find a new playing field, according to Phoenixville Area School District officials.

Meanwhile, the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors sent a letter yesterday to the state Department of Environmental Resources in Norristown informing officials of the recent discovery of hazardous materials on the college grounds.

Supervisor G. Edward Heit, who thinks the recent discovery may be linked to several cancer cases in the area, said this morning that the township sent a letter to Joseph Feola, manager of the DER's Bureau of Waste Management.

The high school lacrosse team was forced to find a new playing field this week when containers with some kind of chemical were found on the second floor of the old psychiatric ward buildings of the former Valley Forge Army Hospital, according to Superin-

tendent Carolyn Trohoski, who refused to identify the substance.

The school district was notified by VFCC officials of the situation on Friday, she said.

Neither VFCC President Wesley Smith, state Department of Environmental Resources officials, nor Chester County Department of Health officials could be reached this morning for comment.

Since the empty buildings are located next to the field where the high school's lacrosse team practices and holds games, the team has been temporarily moved up the street to the Center for Arts and Technology Pickering Campus, Trohoski said.

"We have suspended all play and practice" on the college grounds, she said.

The high school girls' hockey team also practices and plays games during the fall on the same field.

State Rep. Peter R. Vroom, R-157th, said yesterday he is looking into the connection of the cancer cases to the site of the former hospital.

Trohoski reported in January

(Continued on Page 9)

Chemical find forces athletes off area field

(Continued from Page 1)

that about 120 square feet of a 35-acre tract owned by the district was contaminated with heavy metals, including lead and zinc that came from X-ray remains burned in the hospital's incinerator.

The army hospital operated for more than 30 years, treating servicemen wounded in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars. It closed in 1974.

Schuylkill residents concerned about soil

4-12-90
By VERONICA PRATT
(Local News Correspondent)

SCHUYLKILL — More than 150 residents turned out Wednesday to question the board about the discovery of contaminated soil on the grounds of the former Valley Forge Military Hospital.

Besides the board, state Rep. Peter Vroom, R-Valley Forge, Dr. John Maher, director of Chester County's Health Department and township solicitor Robert Sugarman took part in the meeting.

Supervisor Theodore Ryan gave a summary of the case. He said on March 29 the board had been contacted by a property owner, Dr. Joseph Weinstock, who inquired about a possible connection between Hodgkin's Disease and contaminated soil at the hospital.

On April 2, Ryan contacted Maher and asked for his assistance. Seven days later, he telephoned Joseph Scio, manager of bureau of waste management at the state Department of Environmental Resources, reported the situation and asked for intervention.

Ryan said the state agency is scheduled to perform tests on the hospital grounds today.

Residents, however, wanted some answers Wednesday night. Questions ranged from the safety of the well water to how soon results of the site testing will become available.

Sugarman said a connection has to be established and that the process might not be accomplished over night.

"That stuff has been there for years and nobody attached any significance to it," Sugarman said.

"Let's not blame ourselves or the board members ... What's happened over the last eight weeks isn't as important as what will happen over the next eight years," he said.

Maher said, "As far as I know there's been no exposure to this community. There's nothing in medical literature that links Hodgkin's Disease with chemical contamination.

He assured residents that a questionnaire would be sent to them and that he would be looking for the cluster of cases.

Meanwhile residents asked for information on the DER finding as soon as possible. They promised to return to the next meeting.

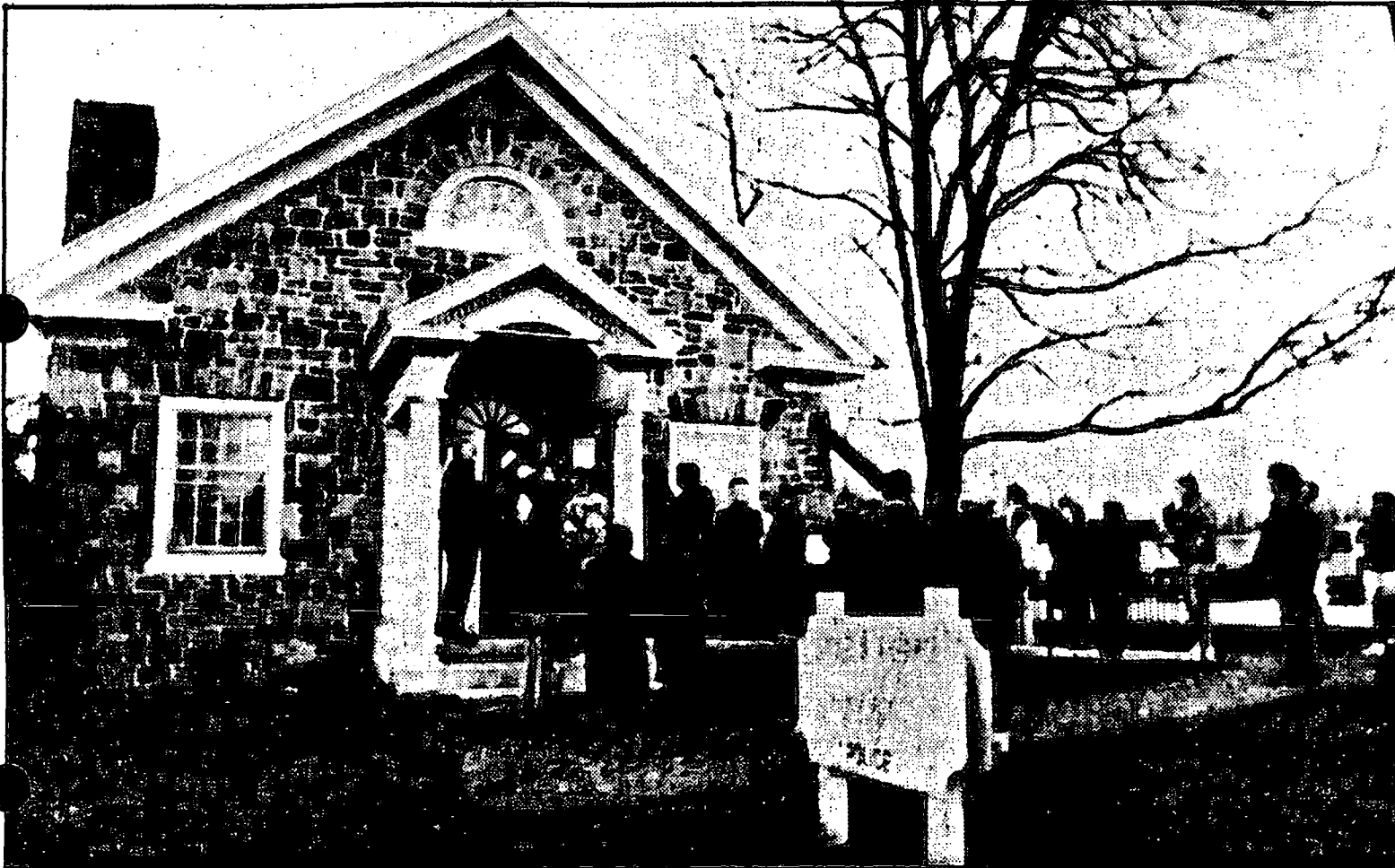


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POTTSTOWN, PA. 19464
THURSDAY, APRIL 12, 1990

ORIGINAL
(Red)

A PUITZER PRIZE-WINNING

-Health concerns attract crowd



POLLUTION FEARS — Residents line up outside the Schuylkill Township building Wednesday, waiting to get inside for the supervisors meeting (above). The size of the crowd — about 130 people — forced the relocation of the meeting to the Valley Forge Fire Hall. Residents were concerned about suspected toxic waste on the site of the former Valley Forge Military Hospital. Among the residents is Jeff Kurtz, who grew up near the site and now is suffering from Hodgkin's disease. (left).



**Residents
fear possible
toxic waste site**

By LINDA TRIEGEL
Special to The Mercury

SCHUYLKILL TWP. — Doctors, lawyers, township and county officials did their best Wednesday night to calm nearly 130 residents who jammed a supervisors meeting to express concern over a suspected toxic waste site.

The size of the crowd forced the supervisors to move the meeting from the tiny township building to the Valley Forge Fire Hall.

Five residents of the Evergreen Acres housing development, who were recently diagnosed as having Hodgkin's Disease, were in attendance.

Hodgkin's disease is cancer of the lymph nodes. All five residents live near the former Valley Forge Military Hospital site, where abnormally high levels of toxic materials were found in the soil in January.

Supervisor Ted Ryan said township officials first learned of the

(See SCHUYLKILL on 5)

Warning: Stay away from tox



Photo by Joe Wallace

Schuylkill resident Michael Fulmer Sr. addresses officials last night about his concerns.

Health offici site at ex-a

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — County officials are warning parents keep their children away from grounds of the former Val Forge General Hospital until they learn if the chemicals and minerals found there pose a health threat.

Department of Environmental Resources (DER) officials toured the site this morning. B. Schuylkill Township Supervisor Theodore Ryan and W. Leuchak of the Chester County Health Department attended.

Health Department Director John P. Maher said last night that contamination would only occur through "prolonged physical contact" with the lead and zinc found in a 120-square-foot depression on the site. The contamination came from x-ray remains buried

For affected neighbors, calm fields belie

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — An eerie silence now hangs over the athletic fields near Linda Nahrgang's home on Ellwanger Drive

against hysteria, they are also warning parents to keep their children from the site until they know more about the chemicals there.

At a Schuylkill Township meeting last night, Nahrgang was among more than 100

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Cancer victims point to childhood play spot in Chesco

ORIGINAL
(Red)

4-13-9

By Daniel Kaufman
Special to The Inquirer

Often during his childhood in Schuylkill Township, Jeff Kurtz crawled under the fence in his back yard onto the land where the Valley Forge Army Hospital once operated.

He loved to stroll through the abandoned red brick buildings, where veterans from World War II and Korea and Vietnam had been treated, or play softball outside with other kids from the neighborhood.

Michael Fulmer Jr. also spent hours roaming around the property.

He and his brother would ride their bikes from their homes in Bevans Orchard a mile away and race them around an oval dirt-bike track.

Now Kurtz, 20, and Fulmer, 21, suffer from Hodgkin's disease, a form of lymphatic cancer. Three other current or former residents of South Evergreen Drive have also contracted the disease over the last 15 years.

Although Hodgkin's disease has never been linked to toxic substances, Fulmer and Kurtz think something on the old hospital grounds may have caused their illnesses.

nesses.

"We thought it was weird that five guys living around the hospital got the disease," Kurtz said.

In January, the Phoenixville Area School District, which leased a 35-acre piece of the property from the federal government for a possible elementary school site, announced it had found highly toxic levels of lead, zinc and silver buried in a sunken 120-square-foot section of ground less than 100 feet from the fence behind Kurtz's former home.

That was about the time Kurtz and

Fulmer found out about each other's conditions. Through a network of friends and relatives, they also learned of the other cases.

Then, last Friday, three small, decayed cans of cyanide powder were found at what once was one of the hospital's psychiatric wards. Wesley Smith, president of the 500-student Valley Forge Christian College, which occupies most of the property, told school officials of the discovery.

As a result, the school district moved its students away from softball and lacrosse fields to another

section of the property, said Carolyn Trohoski. And today, the U.S. Army Chemical Command in Rockford, Ill., will come in to remove the cyanide, Smith said.

Accompanied by family members and Larry Robinson, 44, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's this year, Fulmer and Kurtz asked the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors at meetings on April 4 and on Wednesday to find out why the site, which is about 80 acres, had never been examined more thoroughly and cleaned up. State Rep. Peter R. Vroom

(R., Chester-Montgomery) said at Wednesday's meeting that the state Department of Environmental Resources had run tests on the property and found nothing.

The hospital closed in 1974, and the U.S. General Services Administration began leasing parts of the land to several entities, including Charlestown Township, which uses it as a recreation area.

Chester County Health Director John Maher told about 100 Phoenixville area residents at Wednesday's (See CANCER on 5-B)

CANCER, from 1-B
meeting that lead was by far the most dangerous of the metals, but only through ingestion or prolonged contact with the skin.

"Unless you've got somebody literally rolling in it, it's not a carcinogen," he said.

Maher added that the presence of lead could be remains of lead protection vests incinerated and buried by the hospital, but could also have come from a lead and silver mine that was beneath the property or some other source.

The DER began a site inspection of the property yesterday to assess the level of danger and to look for other possible hazards.

Maher and several other medical experts said that no link between Hodgkin's and any chemical had ever been established.

"It isn't considered a chemical-induced disease — it's expected to be viral," said Howard Frumkin, an epidemiologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

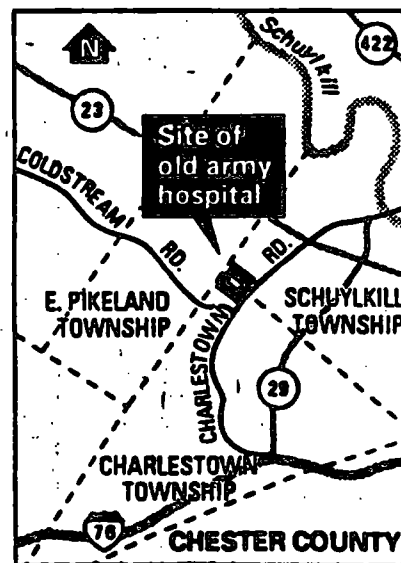
Nevertheless, said Chris Holroyde, an oncologist at Phoenixville Hospital who is treating several of the men, "this is a very unusual clustering of cases which is beyond anything one would normally expect."

Hodgkin's is a "very curable" form of cancer that often strikes men between their late teens and early 40s, Holroyde said.

After each discovered he had the enlarged lymph nodes that signify Hodgkin's disease — Fulmer in June 1987 and Kurtz in December 1989 — they had to drop everything for treatment. Fulmer gave up plans to enlist in the Navy; Kurtz dropped out of Auburn University.

Although they recognize that the cause of their illnesses may never be known, both men say they want to make sure people in the area are made aware of any dangers from the property.

"It's so other people don't get the same problems we do," Fulmer said. "It's been pretty hectic dealing with it."



The Philadelphia Inquirer

Stay away and give time to investigate

Residents who live near the former Valley Forge General Hospital have finally gotten the attention of county health and state environmental officials. Their concerns over toxic chemicals found there are being fully investigated.

Still, it took some brave souls who stood up at a recent meeting and said they have become victims of Hodgkins disease to draw all of this official attention. And it didn't hurt that more than 100 residents crowded into the Valley Forge Fire Co. garage this week to ask public officials what they are doing about it.

The first course of action, officials told parents, is to keep their children away from the grounds of the former hospital until they learn if the chemicals and minerals found there do, indeed, pose a health hazard.

The next day, Department of Environmental Resources (DER) officials toured the contaminated site along with Schuylkill Township Supervisor Theodore Ryan and Walt Leuchak.

The contamination apparently came from x-ray remains burned in the hospital's incinerator years ago. The materials were discovered about 18 months ago by Phoenixville Area School District.

The main thing to remember is not to panic. According to John P. Maher, director of the Chester County Health Department, "You literally have to be rolling in it" to be harmed.

Concerning another find, powdered cyanide discovered last week in a locked room of the former army hospital's psychiatric ward, officials promise to take action. The deteriorating container will be removed from the Valley Forge Christian College building.

The college occupies the buildings where the cyanide was found, and the school district owns the parcel where the contaminants were found.

Understandably, residents were upset when they gathered this week. Township supervisors were asked repeatedly why they did not look into reports of dumping and hazardous chemicals sooner.

"The very evidence of contaminated ground doesn't justify bringing out the Lithuanian Army," was the reply from Norman Vutz, chairman of the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors.

No, this is not a case for the Lithuanian Army. This is a case for health officials to investigate and recommend corrective measures. The school district found the contamination months ago, but the township didn't get involved until literally days ago.

Schuylkill residents voice fear about toxins

By Daniel Kaufman
Special to The Inquirer

Schuylkill Township residents want to call out the Army to Valley Forge.

But this time, they say, the Army's assignment is to clean up its own mess.

More than 100 people packed the Valley Forge Volunteer Fire Company firehouse Wednesday for a special meeting of the Schuylkill Township Board of Supervisors. The meeting was called to discuss what was being done about toxins found

in and around the old Valley Forge Army Hospital.

The hospital treated veterans of World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War during 30 years in operation.

Residents also wanted to know whether the dangerous levels of lead and other metals found in the ground, or the cans of cyanide found in one of the hospital's psychiatric wards, could have caused the five cases of Hodgkin's disease diagnosed in the neighborhood around the hospital in the last 15 years.

In an interview, Wesley Smith, president of Valley Forge Christian College, said the Army Chemical Command in Rockford, Ill., planned to remove the cans of cyanide from the premises.

The hospital property is owned by the U.S. General Services Administration. Portions of it were leased to the Phoenixville Area School District, Valley Forge Christian College and Charlestown Township after the hospital's official closing in 1974. Area residents, however, said the hospital had been used for two more

years. At the meeting, numerous residents criticized the Board of Supervisors for not contacting the appropriate federal, state or county regulatory agencies soon after the Phoenixville school district tested its land in January and found contaminants.

Board members countered that they had jumped on the problem as quickly as possible once they understood the threat.

"Every instance of contaminated ground does not justify bringing out the Lithuanian army," board Presi-

dent Norman Vutz said.

Board members said they had notified the state Department of Environmental Resources branch in Norristown, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta and the Army. The board also notified State Rep. Peter R. Vroom (R, Chester County) and John Maher, Chester County's health director. Board members attended the meeting Wednesday.

Vroom told the board that he had talked to officials from the DER, who said they were looking into the matter. (See TOXINS on Page 9)

Residents voice fear over toxins

TOXINS, from Page 3
he said were "not downplaying this, but they've been testing for years and not finding anything."

DER officials joined Supervisor Ted Ryan and Chester County health officials at the site Thursday.

In an interview Thursday, Jason Gaertner, a DER spokesman, said the agency had not done any additional testing. The agency will examine soil samples already collected by the school district, Gaertner said.

Maher said he did not know whether the metals posed any danger to residents and said he knew of no evidence of a chemical link to Hodgkin's disease. Nevertheless, he said, "I would recommend keeping kids off the property."

Feds called in to probe toxins

4-16-90

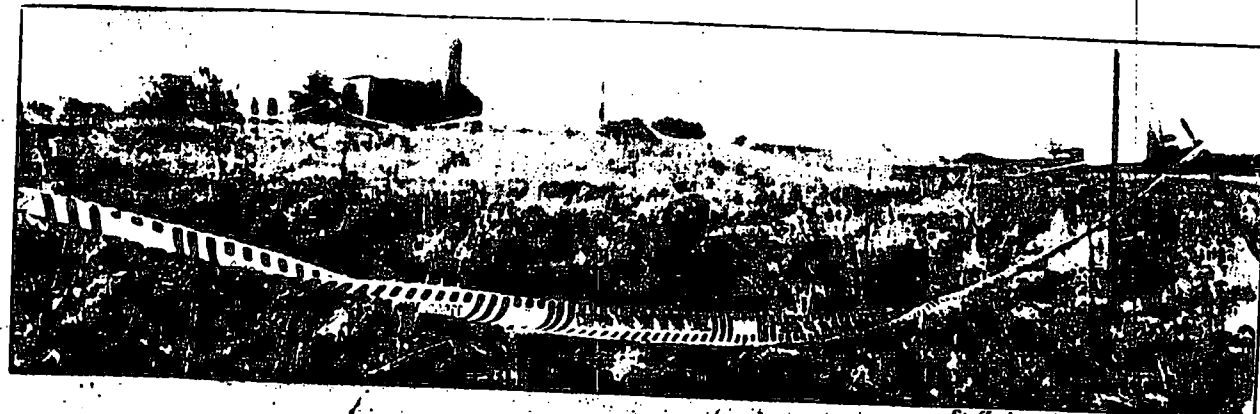
By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — State officials are asking the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to look into the contamination of land surrounding an abandoned incinerator at the site of the former Valley Forge General Hospital.

According to George Danyliw, manager of an eight-county state superfund program, officials concluded after Thursday's site inspection that there may have been dumping in the area.

Danyliw said DER officials will file out a discovery complaint by the end of this week. The complaint will be forwarded to EPA or its evaluation of potential health risk.

In the complaint, DER will



Staff photo by Liz Andrews Willow

The contaminated area is officially off-limits, and a gate nearby has been locked.

outline what it knows about the site, including records of inspections and permits.

It is doubtful that DER granted permits for the incinerator, since the former Army hospital was built and maintained by the

federal government, said Joseph Feola, director of the Bureau of Waste Management for the Norristown Region.

Also included in the DER complaint will be tests of soil samples taken last October for the

Phoenixville Area School District. The results of the tests, announced in January, noted that abnormally high levels of lead and zinc were found in a depression near an abandoned incinerator where hospital waste

was buried. No radiation or organic vapors were found in the holes tested by Lancaster Labs, a consultant for the Phoenixville Area School District.

By law, EPA must complete its assessment of the Township Line Road site within one year of the complaint. Danyliw said he did not know EPA system for handling complaint.

"It may be first come, first serve, or may not be," Danyliw said.

In addition to environmental sampling, EPA will review records of VFGH. After the assessment, EPA will recommend either a "medium" or a "screaming" response, depending on the potential health risk. The EPA assessment will include an in-

(Continued on Page 3)

Feds called in to probe site

(Continued from Page 1)

vestigation of the size of the dump and may include sampling outside the 120-square-foot area identified by the school district.

After that DER will offer its comments on the report. Its comments will determine whether the incinerator dump should be listed among national priority sites. At present there are 708 priority sites in the eastern region of Pennsylvania, Danyliw said.

Feola said the incinerator waste suspected to be buried there is not necessarily hazardous.

"It depends on what it is and the temperatures it was burned at," Feola said.

Meanwhile, a private access road that runs past the site from Township Line Road has been locked. During Thursday's site inspection, the metal fence gate had been unlocked. Also, yellow plastic tape has been staked around the contaminated site.

The site, previously roped off by the school district with red fencing, had not been marked off for several weeks.

(Red)

ORIGINAL

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School teams barred from poisoned field

By LAURA CATALANO
Special to The Mercury

PHOENIXVILLE — Phoenixville Area School District Superintendent Caroline Trohoski has ordered school softball and lacrosse teams to stop using fields feared to be contaminated with toxic waste.

The lacrosse team had been using the field this spring near Evergreen Acres, where five residents have been diagnosed as having Hodgkin's Disease, a cancer of the lymph nodes.

The field is one of two locations where dangerously high levels of lead, zinc and other toxic substances were found by the school district in January. The other field is along Township Line Road near Coldstream Road.

The district acquired the land from the federal government when the Valley Forge Military Hospital closed at the site in 1978.

A softball field and other athletic fields are located at the site near Evergreen Acres.

Trohoski suspended teams from using the field after learning two weeks ago that several area residents who had once played on

The lacrosse team had been using the field, which is one of two locations where dangerously high levels of lead, zinc and other toxic substances were found by the school district in January.

nearby fields had been diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease.

The disease is being linked by the victims to contamination found on the site. However, township and county health officials have declined to make the link, pending further testing.

Trohoski said she suspended softball teams from using the field behind an abandoned building owned by Valley Forge Christian College after learning last Friday that three containers of cyanide had been found in the building.

The containers hold a total of 2 pounds of cyanide, she said. They

(See TEAMS on 6)

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Teams off toxic field

(TEAMS from 1)

were left there for rodent control when the building was abandoned, Trohoski said.

The cyanide was found by a contractor hired by Valley Forge Christian College to demolish the buildings. Either the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or the state Department of Environmental Resources will remove the cyanide, Trohoski said.

Trohoski said the federal government still owns the land near Evergreen Acres.

The federal government allowed the school district 30 years to either build a school on the property or give it back, Trohoski said.

The federal government is responsible for testing the soil and cleanup of the toxins, she said.

There is a chance the district will be reimbursed by the government for the \$7,000 already spent in testing and research.

The district wants to give half the land back to the government and keep the other half for a bus garage and maintenance building. These buildings did not come in contact with contaminated soil, Trohoski said.

The softball team is now playing at the Phoenixville YMCA. The lacrosse games have been moved to a field at the Center for Arts and Technology, Pickering Campus.

Trohoski said all fields will have to be retested before activities can be resumed.

Army Corps joins probe of ash pit

4-21-90

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — The United States Army Corps of Engineers has joined county, state, and federal agencies probing the discovery of a hospital incinerator dump site on the grounds of the former Valley Forge General Hospital.

According to Bruce Heipke, director of FUDS clean up, the agency is trying to shuffle its priorities to fund testing at the VFGH site. FUDS are "formerly used defense sites" that have been transferred to another entity. VFGH is now technically owned by the Phoenixville Area

School District and Valley Forge Christian College.

"We have to reprogram our funds to make funds available for the initial investigation," Heipke said.

Heipke plans to transfer \$20,000 to a Missouri Bureau of The Corps that specializes in testing FUDS, he said. An investigation has to occur and be completed to determine if a cleanup needs to be done.

He said The Corps has about 7,000 FUDS slated for cleanup. He said it targets the "worst ones first."

Heipke said the Army Corps of

(Continued on Page 2)

(Continued from Page 1)

Engineers is concerned about the VFGH property because the incinerated hospital waste buried there is not contained.

According to the Environmental Research Foundation, modern standards for landfilling any type of waste material include a pipe and liner system to collect leachate, water that gets badly contaminated by contacting wastes. ERF, a Princeton-based organization that publishes a weekly hazardous waste newsletter, and other environmental groups contend no landfill is leak proof.

There were no solid waste standards in 1943 when the hospital began burning its refuse. Waste thought to be harmless then has since been found to be hazardous.

ERF said that fractured bedrock beneath a landfill is "highly undesirable" because the wastes can't be located if they escape. In tests performed on a 120 square-foot portion of the dump for the Phoenixville Area School District, rock was found between 8 and 12 feet beneath the surface.

Hepke said he did know how dangerous the ash dump could be.

"At this point in time we don't know the hazard. What is loose in the environment is more of a concern," Heipke said.

He said The Corps has not

rushed to Schuylkill to pick up the cans of cyanide found at VFGH two weeks ago because it is more concerned about investigating the ash dump.

"It has greater potential for hazards than the cyanide," Heipke said.

The Corps has joined the other agencies in the probe, Heipke said, because it may be ultimately be in charge of the clean-up if the contamination is found to be a health risk.

The Environmental Protection Agency is charged with finding the organizations responsible for

dumping in a site and deciding who and how to clean it up.

Since the Army was the obvious creator of the ash waste dump, it would be charged with the cleanup. The Corps of Engineers is the arm of the military that is responsible for cleaning up FUDS.

Residents testing well water near site of toxic ash dump

4-20-90

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — Fearing contamination from an incinerator dump on the grounds of the former Valley Forge General Hospital, residents along Township Line Road have begun testing their wells.

At least two residents who live nearby a plot of land found to have abnormally high levels of lead said they have made appointments to have their wells tested.

A narrow access road is all that divides Maryann Smith's well from the dump site. From the window of her trailer she can see the yellow tape blocking off the contaminated land and she wonders if that is enough to keep the lead away from her well.

Even though Smith drinks bottled water, she still worries.

"I have eight grandchildren. I have them here day and night," she says.

Smith says she can't follow them around to make sure they always drink bottled water. The kids are used to just reaching for a tap, she says.

Smith said she is not going to wait for the Chester County Health Department to recommend testing. She said the safety of her grandchildren is worth the \$155.50 she will have to shell out to know if her water is contaminated.

Smith is testing her well for zinc, lead, sulfur, and silver.

Smith said she drinks bottled water because she has found her well water smells funny.

Smith's neighbor, Dixie Souder, said she is also checking her well water, but she is not panicking.

"There is no sense in panicking now. The damage has been done," Souder said. Souder said her husband, John, planned to get the water tested after tax season. John is an accountant and is very busy during that time of year she said.

John and Dixie began talking about well tests after a recent Schuylkill Township meeting where a number of Evergreen Acres residents called for a probe into a possible link between a



Staff photo by Brian M. Christopher

Scott and Dixie Souder at the side of their pool, which they fill with well water; VFCC is in background.

cluster of Hodgkin's Disease cases and the lead contamination.

"I know some of the people who got cancer in Evergreen Acres. We've gone through hell with them," Souder said.

Although health officials say there is no link she still wonders.

"Is it the water or the grass... You begin to wonder," Souder said.

Evergreen Acres, a housing development northwest of the former Valley Forge General Hospital, and Valley Forge Christian College are served by the Phoenixville Water Department.

Residents along Township Line Road have private well water.

Investigators face prospect VFGH records gone forever

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — Records that could help investigators learn what is buried in a controversial incinerator dump may not even exist.

According to Roy Pirritano, Public Affairs Officer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Philadelphia, records from the former Valley Forge General Hospital were probably destroyed. The Corps is the agency ultimately responsible for cleaning up the dump site.

Pirritano says "completion reports" requested by The Evening Phoenix were "not available." The standard forms were filed by a contractor with The Corps after the hospital was completed in 1943. The reports describe construction of

"You don't know what you are asking for. There are boxes and boxes which were probably burned" ... about eight years after construction of the hospital.

— Roy Pirritano
public affairs officer
U.S. Army Corps
of Engineers

buildings and probably give an indication of a waste disposal plan.

"You don't know what you are asking for. There are boxes and boxes which were probably burned," Pirritano said. He said Corps records were pro-

bably destroyed about eight years after construction.

Without records, it will be difficult for investigators to determine if a cluster of Hodgkin's disease cases in a development near the hospital is linked to what may be buried at the site.

Greg Schirm, director of the Delaware Valley Toxic Coalition, an environmental group concerned with toxic waste, says the key to finding out what was buried around the hospital and if anything could be connected to the Hodgkin's cases is not an epidemiological study or site testing, although those are important.

Testing soil, he says, is like finding a "needle in a haystack" when nothing is known about a site like VFGH.

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Investigators may be facing prospect records destroyed

(Continued from Page 1)

Schirm says records of activities at the VFGH would tell state and federal investigators what to look for in test samples. For instance, Schirm wonders, did doctors use a lot of disposable items made of plastic, as they do in modern hospitals? Plastics are known to produce dioxins but were not used as much then as they are today.

The hospital is known to have been a center for tuberculosis and hepatitis patients. The diseases are contagious, which may have given doctors cause to use disposables.

Purchase records might indicate the chemicals the doctors used. Other records may indicate how were they disposed. It's all

speculation without them.

Alvin E. Cox, a former groundskeeper at the hospital, said last week he supervised the burning of "everything" except radioactive material in the 113 building complex. Cox could not be more specific about what kinds of material he burned over the thirty years he worked there. He said it included infectious waste.

Meanwhile, the Chester County Health Department has begun its preliminary investigation into the cluster of Hodgkin's disease.

Questionnaires about health-care history are being mailed this week to six residents and former residents in Evergreen Acres who have the lymphatic cancer. A consent form seeking permission to study the resident's health records is also being included.

4-25-90

Toxin report on way

4-30-90

Said to show storage tanks, drums buried

By LISA SCHEID
Evening Phoenix Staff

SCHUYLKILL — A site report of an Army Corps inspection of the former Valley Forge General Hospital grounds is expected to show storage tanks and 55 gallon chemical drums buried on the property.

The report, which languished in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers bureaucracy for nearly two years, will be issued within the week, according to Army Corps officials.

"I understand its approval is imminent," said Bill Piccirilli, Army Corps project engineer for the hospital's cleanup. Piccirilli is based in the Baltimore District of the Army Corps.

A suspected ash dump was recently found by the Phoenixville Area School District near a 30-year-old incinerator on the property.

According to Lloyd Shell, director of environmental restoration of FUDS, the Army Corps made the inspection on June 29, 1988, at the request of the Phoenixville Area School District. District officials, who were looking at the land as a site for a new school, have since tested the site themselves. Based on the results of the test, the district decided to give the land back to the federal government.

FUDS are "formerly used defense sites." There about 7,000 FUDS slated for cleanup.

The report, called a "site inventory," lists objects and buildings located visually on the property by Army Corps inspectors. No soil or water testing was done.

Shell said the report took so long to be released because it had to pass through the Army Corps' legal and real estate departments for review. He said the Army Corps was in no rush because the site was not critical.

"As far as we know at the time we disposed of the property, it was not of a critical nature," Shell said.

The Army Corps gave portions of the property to the school district and Valley Forge Christian College in 1976. The district is in the process of returning the land.

The Army Corps does not have the authority to release the report, Shell said. That burden falls on the property owners.

District Superintendent Carolyn Trohoski said last week she would make the information available when she received it.

(Continued on Page 10)

VFCC President Wesley Smith could not be reached for comment.

The site inventory is similar to a preliminary assessment performed on all suspected toxic sites by the Environmental Protection Agency. The EPA has yet to visit the former army hospital site.

Meanwhile, the quest for data on the army hospital continues.

Attempts by the school district to contact former hospital employees have prove fruitless, according to Trohoski.

Army Corps officials denied requests by The Evening Phoenix for hospital records saying that the records may have been destroyed.

The only other information available to describe what menace may be hidden beneath the soil of the former army hospital is a test of soil samples taken in October. A consultant for the school district tested the samples.

That report may not give a true picture of what is in the ground, according to one expert.

Steve Lester, toxicologist for the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste, said the samples could have been diluted, making the site seem less dangerous.

Although the report did note abnormally high concentrations of lead and zinc levels of arsenic, cadmium and other contaminants usually found in incinerator ash did not exceed accepted levels.

According to the Lancaster Lab's report, results of analysis of samples taken at a variety of depths were reported together as a composite. Lester said composite sampling does not give an accurate picture of the danger. If a lot of lead was present in the top of the soil and a miniscule amount in the bottom, Lester said the two could average out to a level within standards. Lester said he would not be able to tell from a composite sample if there was more of a danger in surface contact with contaminated soil or possible leakage into groundwater.

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